

NEWS RELEASE

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INCREASING FIRE DANGER UNDERSCORES IMPORTANCE OF UPCOMING
FIREWISE COMMUNITIES WORKSHOP

A continuing drought and increasing wildfire risk conditions have lead to a closed fire season proclamation for five Utah counties six weeks earlier than normal. As temperatures continue to rise there is a very real possibility of an extreme fire season.

An increasing problem in Utah, as well as nationwide, is the incidence of wildland urban interface fires. For three days this month community leaders from the Rocky Mountain states will gather at Snowbird Resort to learn what it takes to prevent a major tragedy. They will participate in a Firewise Communities Workshop scheduled for April 29 – May 1.

Keynote speaker for the event is Wes Curtis, director of Governor Leavitt's Rural Partnership Office. Curtis has a long involvement in rural issues and works to improve rural communities and economies. He helped establish the Utah Center for Rural Life and the Utah Development Council National Partnership, and helped organize the Emery County Public Lands Council.

"Governor Leavitt knew when he took office that Utah would experience significant growth, and planning allows us to accommodate growth without losing our way of life, it gives us the opportunity to look down the road, so that future generations looking back said we did well," explained Curtis. "The Firewise program boils down to the importance of community and county planning...emergency preparation."

Also at the event will be inspirational speaker, Hollywood producer/entertainer and best-selling author Tom Sullivan. Blind since birth, Sullivan's autobiography If You Could See What I Hear was made into a television movie in the 1980s. He has served as national spokesperson for the Firewise Communities Workshop program since the series was launched in the fall of 1999. He will speak at 2:00 p.m. on Monday, April 29th (see attached schedule).

(more)

On April 30th, the day devoted to an interactive exercise that simulates Firewise planning from the community-interest level, workshop participants will also hear local success stories, one from right here in Utah. The Utah County community of Sundance recognized several years ago the danger it faced from wildland fire. With the help of the Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands and the USDA Forest Service, a community group formed to tackle the problem. Sundance is now a Firewise Community and a model for others to follow.

Sundance represents what the Firewise Communities Workshop Series is all about...recognizing wildland fire hazards and risks, then designing and retrofitting communities and homes to provide better safety.

For more information, visit the website at www.firewise.org/communities.

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